



Gc  
929.2  
G4474b  
1832261

REYNOLDS HISTORICAL  
GENEALOGY COLLECTION

ALLEN COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 1833 01087 3187



Mordecai Gist

and ♀

His American Progenitors

By

Katherine Walton Blakeslee

Historian, Mordecai Gist Chapter

Daughters of the American Revolution

Baltimore, Md.



1832261



Mordchai Gini

and

His American Progenitors

1923

Doc. 2-13-75





Copyrighted 1923  
by  
MORDECAI GISI CHAPTER  
D. A. R.





MORDECAI GIST

P20644



# Mordecai Gist and His American Progenitors

"Maryland, My Maryland"! An elfin sound to those who have loved her long since, but because of the out-flow of population have found themselves removed from her sunny borders and so have lost her for a while; but because she's the place of their nativity, that place in which all childish fancies and ideals have had birth, she is particularly dear to them and they will not fail her.

For those to whom Maryland has given birth and who because of happy circumstances are still within her boundaries, enjoying the consequences of her fine traditions, we only need to pause a moment to congratulate them. Theirs is the special privilege of helping her hold true to her ideals, perpetuating memories and histories of those who have labored ardently and bravely to make Maryland what she is. Theirs is a loyalty that will continue because of such fortunate placing. On them Maryland must depend for that fine patriotic devotion which will "carry on".

For those who are daughters only by adoption, whose hearts turn back to the home of their childhood, to that State in which they first saw the light of day, that State out of which their ancestors marched to battle in 1776, what shall be their attitude toward Maryland? Maryland, their dwelling place by choice, and perhaps the birth place of those they hold most dear, their children, and one of the Thirteen Original Colonies, shall not suffer by their indifference.





We as representative of all those who love Maryland, and as Daughters of the American Revolution, are going to fight her battles, but better still foster that which is best in her, and guard the inheritance that has made her great. Emulous with this a small group of Baltimore women met, March 19th, 1909, and formed a Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and to commemorate the courage and fidelity of one of Maryland's eminent heroes named it, "Mordecai Gist."

As Historian of this Chapter may I present to you, General Mordecai Gist, none the less great because his name fails to stand out in bold relief on our pages of history, a fact due to unfortunate circumstances rather than to just cause. The prominent Historians at the close of the struggle of 1776 were men of the North and without meaning to do an injustice to the South gave prominence to the achievements of those who belonged to their own section. Because of this fact the school children of Maryland have scarcely heard of the splendid patriots of their own State. Therefore, a just pride is felt in presenting to you one who won renown, not only as a hero in arms, but because of effort, intellect and goodness. Will you not help to cherish this memory?

General Mordecai Gist's great-grandfather, Christopher Guest (not Gist) was his most honorable immigrant ancestor. He settled in Baltimore County before 1682 and owned considerable land on the south side of the Patapsco River. It is recorded that Christopher Guest was a member of the Grand Jury and was also one of the justices of Baltimore County. He married Edith Cromwell, daughter of Richard Cromwell, a member of that renowned English family.

If we quote from the wills of Mordecai Gist's progenitors those paragraphs expressive of reverence to and faith in





an Almighty Father surely some cause can be seen for the strength of purpose which characterized his life. They also illustrate the piety that gave to our country its firm basis, a piety that is quickly passing in form but one which we should be quick to hold in its reality.

Christopher Guest departed this life in 1690. Following are extracts from his will:

"In the name of God, the seventeenth day of February, A. D. 1690, I, Christopher Guest, of Baltimore County, being sick in body but of good and perfect memory, thanks be to Almighty God, and calling to mind the uncertain estate of this transitory life, and that all flesh must yield unto Death when it shall please God to call, do make, constitute, and ordain this my last will and testament."

He gave his dearly beloved wife, Edith, full power to pay all debts, to dispose of all his earthly goods and to divide same between her and their only son, Richard. Two heifers were to be given to his mother Guest if she were alive; then he closed the document with these words:

"The Lord have mercy upon my soul. So  
I bid the world farewell."

There seems to be some uncertainty as to the exact date of the death of his wife, Edith, our hero's great-grandmother. She re-married twice, first Williams, by whom she had four children. Her third husband was John Beecher, but that devotion was of short duration for she died soon after. Though married to Beecher, in her will she styles herself as Edith Williams. She was also deeply religious. The following is an extract from her will:

"I, Edith Williams, of Patapsco River in Baltimore County, in the province of Maryland, being of sound and



perfect memory, though very weak in body, and not knowing how soon it may please Almighty God to take me hence, do ordain and constitute this my last will and testament, Imprimis: I commit my soul into the hands of my Creator, through Whose mercy and the mercies of Jesus Christ, my Saviour, I trust to enjoy eternal happiness."

She made a request that after her death, her brother, Richard Cromwell and Mr. Thomas Staley, because of the great confidence she had in their fidelity and honesty, take into their custody her son, Richard Gest, whom she requested to be put to school and there be kept till he could write and cast accounts fitting for merchant business.

After her death the name is no more spelt Guest nor Gest but Gist, or if fancy bids us, Gïst.

Richard Gist, son of Christopher and Edith Gist, and grandfather of General Mordecai Gist, was born in 1684 and died in 1741. In 1705 he married Zepporah Murray, by whom he had eight children. He was one of the justices and commissioners of Baltimore County and was appointed continually until his death.

An act for laying out and erecting Baltimore Town passed the House July 30th, 1729. It was signed by Governor Calvert, August 8th and Captain Richard Gist was appointed one of seven commissioners to carry out its provisions. He also represented his County in the Provincial Assembly the last two years of his life. He was commissioned Captain in the County Militia. He was a man of unusual intellect and one whose life was exemplary. No doubt the qualities that fitted Mordecai Gist for leadership were in part moulded after the splendid character that belonged to his grandfather.

There is no record of a will left by Richard Gist. His and Zepporah Murray's second son, Thomas, father of General Mordecai Gist, was born in 1712 and died in 1787. He



married Susannah Cockey, July 2nd, 1735, and they moved to their farm, which is now known as the McDonough School Farm, not far in the rear of Ten Mile House on Reisterstown Turnpike. In 1780 we find Mr. Thomas Gist interested in church affairs. "The vestry of St. Thomas' Parish empowered him to lay the state of that parish before St. Paul's Parish, Baltimore Town, and request their Christian aid and attention by indulging them with the services of their minister a certain part of the time, for which service the vestry of St. Thomas' Parish agree to pay him in such manner and such proportion as he, the said minister, and Thomas Gist should agree upon, provided that it did not exceed two hundred and fifty bushels of grain for one third of his time and so on in proportion."

Thomas Gist became a distinguished Revolutionary Officer. He was Commander of the Soldier's Delight Battalion and drilled the boys, sending them when needed to his son Mordecai at the front. A worthy life was missed when he passed away at the age of nearly seventy-five, but the fine example he set was reflected in the life of his son. Below is a paragraph from his will:

"In the name of God, Amen. I, Thomas Gist of Baltimore County and State of Maryland, farmer, being in perfect health and sound mind, memory and understanding, but considering the uncertainty of this transitory life, do make, publish and declare this my last will and testament in manner and form following, namely, that is to say and principally I commit my soul into the hands of God, my Creator; my body I commit to the earth to be decently buried."

He had made provision during his life for several of his sons and so states in his will. The one whom we are considering was one of these sons. He was born February 22nd, 1742, and was the fourth child of Colonel Thomas Gist and his wife, Susannah Cockey. They named him Mordecai.





In reading the records of this man one almost feels justified in assuming that his life was influenced and consecrated to his country because another Mordecai of long ago, one whose name he bore, said to Esther, "And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this"?

I haven't attempted to give you the history of any but the direct ancestors of General Mordecai Gist, but because there is no family in the country who contributed more officers to the service of our country in every hour of her need, pre-eminently in the Revolutionary War, perhaps it is fitting that we mention a few who were closely related to him.

Aside from his father, Colonel Thomas Gist, his uncle Christopher Gist, Jr., was also distinguished as a Colonial Hero. He was a noteworthy surveyor and had the honor of acting as Washington's guide to Fort Duquesne in 1753 and fought with him at Braddock. Nathaniel Gist, Ensign of the famous Virginia Regiment, commanded by his gallant uncle, Colonel Nathaniel Gist, was killed in company with his nephew, Richard Gist, at King's Mountain. These were probably the first of this noble family to make the supreme sacrifice for their country, although not the first of their line to offer their lives thus.

Colonel Joshua Gist, of Frederick, a brother of General Mordecai Gist, was the gallant leader of a regiment of militia in 1776. Another of this fighting stock was John Gist, Captain of Gist's Continental Regiment, March, 1777, and yet another was Lieutenant Thomas Gist of the 12th Maryland Regiment.

This splendid military family intermarried with others of its kind, including the Howards, Ridgelys, Cockeys, Hammonds, Cromwells, Harveys, Murrays, Carmans, Sterretts, Orndorffs, Elders, etc.





Mordecai Gist, the most prominent of this noted family, was born at the old homestead known as Soldiers' Delight, near Reisterstown. On this farm he spent his boyhood. His birth is registered at Old St. Paul's and at St. Paul's Parish School, Baltimore, he received his education. When the war broke out he was a merchant on Gay Street and was a leader among the young men of the City.

In December, 1774, Maryland sent delegates to Annapolis and they recommended that she prepare for the conflict which they foresaw as inevitable. In response to that call a band of patriots assembled in Baltimore and organized as the "Baltimore Independent Company". Mordecai Gist was chosen Captain of this first Revolutionary Corps, organized in Maryland. When the Revolution broke out he put himself at the head of a Company, the first recruited in Maryland, and led them forth to the defence of the Colonists.

The following letter written by him to Hon. Matthew Tilghman in convention at Annapolis not only settles the oft disputed question as to when the first military company was organized in Maryland at the coming of the Revolution, but it shows the character of the man and his fitness for leadership:

"Coffee House,  
December 30, 1775.

Sir:

Permit me to address you as President of that Honorable Body, whose rules I consider as sacred, and to which I have ever paid a ready and cheerful obedience. Prompted by the regard I owe my country, I did, at the expense of my time and the hazard of my business, form a company of militia, early in December, 1774, a company composed of gentlemen, men of honor, family and fortune, and though of different countries, animated by a zeal and reverence for rights of humanity, they have acted superior



to the narrow attachments that influence contracted minds whose sentiments are determined by the place of their nativity. Unanimously approved of by this company, I have twice been appointed to the honor of being their commander, since the last of which we remonstrated to the Council of Safety, praying to be confirmed as an independent company.

Having received no answer I am induced to believe that such an establishment ought not to be acceded to; but still desirous of being of service to my country I have entered my name among the number of applicants who are soliciting preferment from the Convention.

That cruel and unjust system of policy which has for many years influenced the British Senate, has long since inclined me to lose sight of an honorable accommodation with the Mother Country, unless resisted by a brave and manly opposition.

This consideration led me to an early and constant attention to military affairs; and allow me, sir, to assure you that I have neither spared time nor expense in the acquisition of that kind of knowledge. In private life I have ever been ambitious of being the useful citizen.

Emulous of that character, I wish to assume the soldier; and if appointed to an office (not beneath what my former rank entitled me to) I shall endeavor to acquit myself with honor to those who are pleased to appoint me.

I am, sir,

Your most humble servant,

MORDECAI GIST."

As a result of this fine spirited letter the Maryland Convention appointed him Second Major of General Smallwood's First Maryland Battalion, January 1, 1776. The bravery of this heroic man was soon put to test in the battle of Long Island, August, 1776. The Maryland Regiment of 450 men was under his command, while Colonel Smallwood and Lieutenant Colonel Ware were in New York attending Court



Martial. By his courage and the self-devotion of those under him, as well as their fine discipline, of which they were proud, they were enabled with fixed bayonets to charge upon the overwhelming forces opposed to them. Five times this little band charged the forces of Cornwallis. Each time it was driven back only to gather energies for a fiercer attack, until upon the sixth attempt the British gave way in confusion. It was the first time the American Continentals had dared to meet in the fierce encounter of bayonets of the British Regulars, and it was Maryland's hero, Mordecai Gist, who taught his countrymen that they were equal to such a conflict. Washington witnessed this assault, and when he saw the great massacre, exclaimed: "Great God, what must my brave boys suffer this day!" By their valor they became known as "The Bayonets of the Revolution."

On Washington's retreat through New Jersey, Major Gist's Marylanders had been reduced to 190 effective men. They, with a few others, covered the retreat. Soon after Major Gist was made a colonel and General Smallwood sent him with a detachment against the Somerset and Dorchester County Tories and Insurgents. They were put to flight, many captured and others forced into obedience by his stern measures. The Battle of Brandywine was fought while Colonel Gist was at home to see his sick wife. On learning of the disastrous termination he at once rejoined the army with reinforcements collected at home.

In May, 1779, Maryland was threatened with a British invasion. Colonel Gist was requested to take command of its defenses. Shortly after this he was made Brigadier General. At Germantown he was in the thickest of the fight, and on the disastrous field of Camden it was Gist who stood side by side with the noble De Kalb.





What finer record of any service have we than that given by those under whom or with whom one serves. General De Kalb, who was mortally wounded at Camden, spent his last moments in dictating letters to Generals Gist and Smallwood expressing praise and affection for them and their men, who had so nobly stood by him in that deadly battle.

General Gist subsequently was engaged in recruiting and forming new regiments and in laying the wants of the army before the Government. Returning to active service, he took part in the expulsion of the British from the Southern States and was present at the siege and capture of Yorktown. He rendered efficient service and aided materially in the operations that led to the surrender of Charleston by the British. It was Maryland's hero who turned more than one disastrous defeat into a glorious victory. For almost ten years he gave himself unreservedly to his country, never failing to show in his authority at all times those fine qualities of justice, mercy and truth. We find them strongly illustrated in the following extracts from a letter he wrote from Pennsylvania to Governor Johnson, dated October 31st, 1777: "The ungenerous behaviour of Col. Hopper, who, when a scattering fire began, became immediately attacked with qualms of sickness that obliged him to leave his regiment and retreat to Maryland, lays me under the indispensable obligation to report his conduct to your Excellency, which thru regard to his connections and reputation I have heretofore declined. As mankind cannot be answerable at all times for the weakness and frailty of the human heart his feelings demanded more pity than resentment and led me to conceal his error until I had the pleasure of waiting on you in person."

Upon arriving in Baltimore with the remnant of the Maryland Line, July 27, 1783, from South Carolina, General Gist was received with an enthusiasm which testified to the satisfac-





tion of Baltimore in his splendid achievements. Congress voted thanks to him for the valiant part he took in the battle of Camden, S. C. General Washington never disguised his admiration for him nor concealed his gratitude to him. Adversity often weakens the spirit, glory frequently intoxicates, but Mordecai Gist bore his sufferings bravely and carried his honors modestly. He was a big, modest man.

With the cessation of hostilities General Gist purchased a plantation at Charleston, South Carolina, where he resided until the close of his life. This illustrates that great aftermath of war or any upheaval that affect people as a whole, that seeking of new homes and new surroundings. This is also History-in-the-making, and presents many potent realities to us, particularly this exodus that took place after the struggle of 1776.

General Gist was the first Vice President of the Maryland Branch of the Cincinnati, which was instituted at the close of the war. He was three times married. His first wife was Cecil Carman, of Baltimore County. She died in giving birth to a daughter, who lived only seven months. Mother and child lie in the same grave in the north corner of St. Thomas' Churchyard, Baltimore County.

His second wife was Mary Sterrett, of Baltimore. She gave birth to a son, 1779, who was named Independence, probably by his father because he was born during that great struggle for Independence.

His third wife was Mrs. Cattell, of South Carolina, and she was the mother of his son, States Gist, whom he, too, doubtless named for patriotic reasons. One daughter, also, Susannah, was born of this union.

The richest wealth of any people is the fame of their great men; all other evidences of their existence may pass away, this



alone remains. General Mordecai Gist died in Charleston, S. C., August 2d, 1792. Here he lies buried, close to old St. Michael's Church of Revolutionary renown, where General Washington, the Marquis de Lafayette and later General Robert E. Lee worshipped. The sixth monument erected to Maryland heroes by the Maryland Sons of the <sup>American</sup> Revolution was to this noble man, Mordecai Gist. The handsome granite tablet was unveiled November 6th, 1915, at Charleston, S. C., with fitting ceremonies participated in by a delegation from Maryland and prominent South Carolinians.

Miss Waters, of the Mordecai Gist Chapter of the D. A. R. of Maryland, and a lineal descendant of this illustrious man, presented a wreath at the unveiling bearing these words, pregnant with meaning, "Lest We Forget."

The patriot heroes of 1776 are no more. One by one they have passed to their final resting place. All the gallant leaders of the Old Maryland Line have gone, but that which they accomplished still lives. American Liberty achieved by their patriotic zeal and consecrated by their blood cannot die. May we who enjoy this richest inheritance labor to keep it sweet and strong and pass it on to our children, and to our children's children, so that they in turn may rise up and call us blessed.











JUN 75



N MANCHESTER,  
INDIANA

